

GALATIANS 1:1-24

No Other Gospel

Memory Verse

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father"

Galatians 1:3-4

Real-life Problems

Confusion

Whether it's in church, at home, at school, or in a friend group, we often hear contradictory opinions about how we should live our lives. For both the Galatians and Christians today, religious and cultural divisions can lead to contradictory and confusing messages. Who and what are we supposed to believe?

The Good News

Paul begins with the best news: Jesus died for our sins, delivering us from this sinful world and cementing our place in heaven with God for eternity. While the Galatians have been misled by false teachings, Paul reminds them of the true gospel, and the story of God's saving grace.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Have you ever disagreed with someone about something, big or small? How did you resolve your disagreement?

Idea #2: Have you ever been surprised or betrayed by someone close to you? How did it make you feel?

Idea #3: When you have a question, to whom do you look for answers? Parents? Teachers? Older siblings? Why do you turn to them?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Galatians?

The apostle Paul wrote Galatians. In the early church, an apostle was someone sent with divine authority, and Paul received his message directly from Jesus (Gal 1:12, 15-23).

2) Who was the original audience?

Paul wrote "to the churches in Galatia" (v. 2), indicating a number of churches scattered throughout the region of Galatia in central Turkey. Many members of Paul's original audience were Gentile converts to Christianity.

3) Why was the letter to the Galatians written?

Paul wrote to correct and encourage the churches, which had been divided by theological and racial issues because of false teachers.

What's going on?

REMIND

Paul, a former Pharisee and persecutor of the early Christian church, had a dramatic conversion experience and became an apostle of Christ. He planted churches in cities across the Mediterranean Sea, including several churches in Galatia.

After Paul left Galatia to plant churches elsewhere, false teachers began stirring up dissension and "teaching a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you" (Gal 1:8). Paul is surprised and angry that the Galatians have been led astray, and he fiercely defends his teaching as the one true gospel.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

In this chapter, Paul greets the Galatians with a reminder of the grace and peace found in Christ Jesus, and then he quickly moves to condemn the false teachings that have arisen and led to confusion. Paul reminds them that there is no other gospel, and he harshly condemns any other so-called gospels. Lastly, Paul establishes his authority to speak on the matter, reminding the Galatians that his authority comes directly from God, not from himself or other men.

- 1) Jesus died to save us because we cannot save ourselves (vv. 3-5)
- 2) There is only one gospel, the gospel of Jesus (vv. 6-10)
- 3) Paul is a living testament of grace, and his authority is from God (vv. 11-24)

Read

Read **Galatians 1:1-24** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) An "apostle" is someone who is sent, like a messenger. Who sent Paul (v. 1)? Who didn't send Paul?

Through Jesus, God the Father called Paul to be an apostle. Paul's authority comes straight from God, not from other men.

2) Paul begins most of his letters with the greeting, "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). In Galatians, however, what does he add to his greeting in verses 3-5?

He reminds the Galatians that Jesus died for their sins to deliver them from this world, and he also offers praise to God.

3) What does Paul criticize in verse 6? Whom does he attack in verse 7?

He criticizes the Galatians for "deserting" the gospel of grace offered by Jesus in favor of different, false teachings in verse 6.

He specifically calls out the false teachers for preaching a false gospel contrary to what Paul taught in verse 7.

4) How did Paul receive the message he was sharing with the Galatians (vv. 11-12)? What was Paul like before this revelation (vv. 13-16, 23)?

Paul received the gospel directly as a revelation from Jesus Christ. He did not learn it from others, and he didn't come to it by his own wisdom. Before converting, Paul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee, and a persecutor of the church—he was the most unlikely hero.

5) Where did Paul go after receiving the gospel (vv. 16-17)? Whom did he eventually visit (vv. 18-19)?

Rather than going to associate with other Christians in Jerusalem, Paul went to Arabia and then to Damascus. After three years, he visited Cephas (Peter) and James in Jerusalem, two of the most important leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why do you think Paul greeted the Galatians with this special greeting in verses 3-5? What does this greeting tell us about the nature of our sin? What does it tell us about God?

From the start, Paul reminds his audience of the message of the gospel: that Christ died for their sins, and that they are saved by grace. He knows the false teachings that are leading them astray, and he wants to open with the message of the true gospel.

When we look at verse 4 closer, a few important things become clear. First, we need to be "rescued" or "delivered" for our sin. We are completely and totally hopeless and helpless on our own, and we need a rescuer. Our sin is so much bigger and worse than we can ever imagine, and as a result, only God can pay the price. Second, Jesus is our rescuer, who "gave Himself" for our sins. We did nothing; Christ did everything. Finally, we see that this has all been part of God's plan (v. 4), to raise Jesus from the dead (v. 1) and save us by His grace (v. 6). It's about His efforts, not ours.

2) What emotions is Paul experiencing in verses 6-10? Why? What does he say to false teachers? What is significant about his reaction?

He's astonished, shocked, and surprised in the worst possible way (v. 6). The people he loves have been misled and divided. They have lost the core of his teaching: that Jesus saves us by His grace. He's disappointed, but he's also angry. Paul is passionate, and he lays a curse upon anyone who teaches anything contrary to the gospel he already shared with them (vv. 8-9).

This isn't an idle threat or a proud boast, but rather a reminder that his authority is truly from God alone. As an apostle, he has been commissioned by God to spread the gospel, and his opponents are challenging God, not him. For Paul, this isn't just a minor disagreement that can be overlooked, but this is the core of following Christ, and as a result, it is truly a matter of life and death. Any "gospel" that tries to add or subtract from the gospel of grace is a false gospel, and should be rejected entirely.

3) Why is it so significant that Paul was sent by God (v. 1), and that his gospel was received by direct revelation (vv. 11-12)?

In chapter 1, Paul wants to re-establish his credibility before the Galatians. Though false teachers have arisen to contradict him, Paul has something they cannot claim: authority straight from Jesus. The gospel was revealed to Paul by Jesus Himself. He wasn't taught it by other Christians, and he didn't come to it by his own merits or wisdom. As such, they can trust that his teaching comes straight from God.

4) What is significant about Paul's past and his conversion (vv. 13-16)? How is Paul uniquely qualified to speak in the argument over whether salvation is by grace or by works?

Paul's dramatic life turnaround speaks directly to the saving and transformative power of God's grace. As a Pharisee, Paul was a prodigy, zealously following the law and "advancing in Judaism" beyond his years. He also persecuted the early Christian church and participated in the killing of some Christians, including Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:2). Then, suddenly, God turned his life upside down "by His grace," and Paul became a follower of Jesus. The former persecutor became a preacher, and Paul's story was nothing short of miraculous. He was a walking testament to God's grace.

Further, because of his past as a rule-following Pharisee, Paul was uniquely qualified to speak on the controversy in Galatia. As we will learn in later chapters, the false teachers were preaching that works were necessary in addition to faith in order to be saved. These teachers wanted to convert Gentiles to Judaism, and to force the Old Testament law upon all followers of Jesus as the means for salvation. But because Paul had already lived a life as a Pharisee, he knew the futility of trying to earn God's approval or present yourself as acceptable before God by your own efforts. He knew that no amount of human effort could compare to the saving grace of Jesus, and by bringing up his past, Paul reminds the Galatians that he has already been down the path of their false teachings, and he knows it leads to death.

The Complete 180

In 21st century language, it can be hard to visualize Paul's transformation from rule-following Pharisee to devout follower of Jesus saved by grace. One day, he was the model Pharisee, killing Christian "heretics" and following the law as his source of righteousness. Then one day, he did a complete 180 and was never the same, following Jesus and preaching salvation by grace.

Transformations this drastic are hard to come by, but picture Darth Vader. Mass murdering Sith lord, the baddest bad guy of all time, trying to crush the Rebellion forever. Though Paul wasn't wielding a lightsaber, he was a villain to the early church. Then, at the end of Return of the Jedi, Vader has a change of heart, and Luke brings out the good left in him. Vader turns, killing the emperor and sacrificing himself in the process. For most of the trilogy, this change is unimaginable, and yet, Vader dies a hero.

Though comparing Paul to Darth Vader might be a stretch, the transformation on the road to Damascus was equally unbelievable and could only be the result of God's grace.

5) Why do you think Paul went to Arabia and waited three years before going to Jerusalem (vv. 16-17)? Why did he eventually go to Jerusalem, and what is significant about the people he saw there (vv. 18-19)?

First, Paul was emphasizing that the gospel he received was from God, not from men. He didn't need to consult Christian leaders in Jerusalem because he had received everything he needed directly from God. Though commentators disagree on what Paul did in Arabia and where exactly he went, most agree that Paul likely spent considerable solitary time in the wilderness, studying and learning from God. Alone, he could reflect and grow in personal relationship with God. At the same time, there were many thriving cities in Arabia, and, according to pastor Tim Keller, it is likely that Paul began his preaching ministry during this time.

Still, Christians are not called simply to a life of solitude, so Paul eventually did go to Jerusalem to be with other believers. He didn't go to learn from them, but to ensure that they were unified in their message and that there would be no division as a result of his ministry to the Gentiles. Though this may come across as prideful on his part, in reality, it is a reflection of Paul's humble submission and dedication to God's calling. Paul's journey to Jerusalem helped spread news of his ministry and led others to glorify God (v. 24). As we see elsewhere in the New Testament, Cephas (Peter) and James (the brother of Jesus) are two of the most important leaders in the early Church, and Paul wanted to ensure that there was unity among them.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) In this opening chapter, Paul works hard to establish his authority as an apostle from God. Whom do you look to for teaching and instruction, for the truth about how the world works? How do you know whom to trust?

2) In verse 10, Paul declares that servants of Christ cannot live by trying to please men. Are there areas in your life where you struggle with trying to please others? Do you seek the approval of men, or of God?

3) According to verses 23-24, when other people began to hear of Paul's conversion, they "glorified God" because of him. His testimony was a powerful reminder of God's grace. Have you shared your story with anyone recently? Do you live as a witness pointing others to Christ?

Answers may vary, but encourage students to take time to write out their testimonies, if they have not done so, and to look for opportunities to share.

Main takeaway

There is only one gospel: the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose again, saving us by His grace rather than our best efforts. Paul received this gospel directly from Jesus, and was sent by God to declare it, and Paul writes to correct the Galatians misled by false teachings. As a former Pharisee and persecutor of the church, Paul's testimony highlights the saving and transforming power of God's grace.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Paul begins with the best news: Jesus died for our sins, delivering us from this sinful world and cementing our place in heaven with God for eternity. While the Galatians have been misled by false teachings, Paul reminds them of the true gospel, and the story of God's saving grace.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father God, we thank You for the one true gospel. We thank You for Your infinite grace, poured out for us on the cross, saving us from our sins by Your power and not our own. Teach us to accept and trust in Your grace, and not to add anything to the gospel we have received. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What does it mean that you are saved by grace alone? Is it hard for you to accept and believe this? Are there things you try to add to God's grace to earn His favor? Take a few minutes to talk to God about His grace. If God's grace is not something you have accepted into your life, consider praying with a leader.
- 2) Whether it's a new friend group, a potential college, someone you look up to, or even a cute guy or girl, in what ways do you live for approval from others? What might it look like to live instead for God's approval?
- 3) Have you ever had the opportunity to share your testimony? If so, how did it go? Whether you've ever shared or not, take a few minutes and begin to journal God's work in your life so far.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Parents, ask your kids what authority figures they look up to. When they have big questions or need guidance, whom can they trust to provide good, wise answers? Whom should they not trust?
- 2) As a family, do you try to present yourselves in a certain way to other families? Do you try to earn the approval of others as parents, kids, or as a whole family?
- 3) As parents, take a few minutes to share your testimony with your children. Like Paul, your story can be a powerful tool to point others to Jesus. How have you seen Jesus work in your life?